

Techie fired over Grokster comments on BBC

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A British IT consultant accused by the Hollywood movie industry of running a BitTorrent file-sharing hub has been sacked by his employer after appearing on BBC 2's Newsnight programme last week to comment on the US Supreme Court ruling on Grokster.

Alex Hanff was served with legal papers by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) earlier this year, which claims Hanff's DVD-Core website had been helping people to illegally download copyrighted films.

It was on the back of this that Hanff was asked to appear on Newsnight to comment on the US Supreme Court ruling that peer-to-peer companies such as Grokster could be held responsible for the copyright piracy on their networks.

But on his return to work the next day Hanff was sacked by Aldcliffe Computer Systems in Lancaster, where he had been working for just a week.

The company said that he failed to disclose the pending MPAA file-sharing civil lawsuit during the application process for the job and only became aware of it from the Newsnight interview.

Tribal Group, the parent company of Aldcliffe Computer Systems, said in a statement: "The decision to terminate his employment was made in order to defend our legitimate business interests. Mr Hanff has declared that he is opposed to copyright and intellectual property laws. Since much of our business is based around the protection of our copyright and intellectual property, we consider our dismissal of Mr Hanff entirely justified and appropriate."

But Hanff claims the company gave him permission to leave work early to appear on Newsnight and said he plans to appeal against the dismissal at an employment tribunal.

He told silicon.com: "They are claiming they fired me because of my opinion, which is a breach of my human rights."

In the meantime Hanff said he has been advised by his legal representatives to ignore the MPAA civil action.

"It is a civil case and the MPAA has no jurisdiction in the UK," he said.

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